

Owner preps for possible commercial project

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CARENCRO — Demolition crews are pulling apart the old Evangeline Downs Racetrack clubhouse this month, making way for a possible commercial development that the owner of the property hopes will take its place.

Owner Carrol Castille said he also wants to develop property behind the track into an upscale neighborhood, using money from the commercial and residential projects to fund a \$2 million renovation of a horse training facility that will remain at the site.

“That’s why I bought it, to make sure it stays here. This will be the elite training center in the Southeast,” said Castille, a Carencro businessman with strong ties to the horse racing industry.

Castille bought the old race track in June, along with 255 acres between Interstate 49 and Moss Street.

The track had been closed since 2004, when operations shifted from Carencro to a new facility in Opelousas to take advantage of legalized slot-machine gambling in St. Landry Parish.

Castille saw no possibility of racing returning to Carencro but said it still has been difficult to watch the demolition of the old clubhouse, which opened in 1966.

“I’ve been in the industry my entire life. I was born and raised in that place,” he said. “There’s a lot of sentimental value to me and whole lot of people.”

Charles Ashy Jr., who manages the horse training center behind the old track, has watched with mixed feelings as heavy equipment picks away at the old clubhouse.

Ashy’s father was a longtime general manager of Evangeline Downs.

“A lot of people spent their whole lives there, including myself,” Ashy said. “... In a way, I was looking forward to the demolition because it was so deteriorated.”

Ashy said he is pleased with Castille’s decision to purchase the property because another owner might not have been committed to keeping the horse training center, which stables from 500 to 1,000 horses, depending on the season.

“The training center could have been lost,” Ashy said.

Castille said he has received several inquiries about the site of the track, clubhouse and parking lot — 42 acres along I-49 in Carencro.

“A lot of interest. I can’t disclose any of it,” he said.

Castille said he hopes to develop the rear portion of the property as a high-end residential neighborhood, with about 100 1-acre and half-acre lots and a minimum home size of 2,800 square feet.

“It’s a really nice piece of property that will make some beautiful lots,” he said.

He said planning for the residential development is still in the early stages.

Demolition of the old clubhouse is expected to be completed within the next two or three weeks.

Castille also owns the Ranch Outlet in Carencro, a telecommunications company and a few large tracts of property in the Carencro area.

He recently developed the strip mall at the Gloria Switch/I-49 interchange.